

# Language Spread in a Multilingual Setting: The Spread of Hindi as a Case Study

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The Indian subcontinent, like many other regions of the world, has witnessed movements of populations and indigenization of migrants. The linguistic prehistory of the subcontinent as unravelled by Emeneau (1954) and others gives broad but fairly reliable details of the movements and shifts of populations and of the spread and/or extinction of languages on the subcontinent in that distant past. Aryan migration (circa 2000 B.C.) to the subcontinent brought an Indo-European language, viz., old Indo-Aryan or early Vedic, which in due course spread over the entire northern part of the country. Speakers of the then-existing other languages of the subcontinent were either pushed towards the southern part of the subcontinent or to the peripheral mountainous regions in the north and northeast of the country. A large number of them gave up their languages (either willingly or otherwise) and accepted the language of the conquerors. This sequence of events, i.e., the entry of a new language and its spread and indigenization, may have occurred earlier in the case of Dravidians also, if Dravidian speakers also came to India from outside as is believed by a number of scholars on the basis of some circumstantial evidence.

The spread of the Indo-Aryan language, the language of a handful of conquerors in northern India, is a noteworthy phenomenon. The factors for its spread are not the same as those which have been suggested as contributing to the spread of Arabic, Greek and Latin in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. Brosnahan (1963) has suggested four factors positively associated with the spread of Arabic, Greek, and Latin: military conquest, duration of military authority, linguistic diversity of the population through which the language spreads, and material advantages associated with the knowledge of the new language. The fac-

tors responsible for the spread of the Indo-Aryan in north India are not the same. Apart from its being the language of the rulers, Indo-Aryan spread because of the awareness and acceptance of the cultural and intellectual supremacy of the Aryans. The adoption of Indo-Aryan also enhanced the social status of the native populace by making them aligned, if not identified, with the higher social group of the society. All this, of course, yielded material gains apart from social, cultural and intellectual benefits. During a couple of centuries before Christ, and shortly after, many smaller groups of invaders came and settled in north India, foremost among them the Sakas, Kushans and Huns, from different parts of Asia. All of them accepted the local languages by giving up their own. The same was later true of Gurjars and Abhirs. The factors for this language replacement could not have been purely political as it was the conquerors who adopted the language of the vanquished. The factors must have been social, cultural, and intellectual. In many cases, these invading groups were predominantly male and their marrying native women and settling down may account for the eventual displacement of their languages. The small number of the invaders is also likely to have been responsible for the loss of their languages. The spread of Sanskrit and Pali in Ceylon, South East Asia and the Far East is also associated with religious and cultural factors and not with political and military reasons.

In medieval times the Muslim invasion and conquest of India resulted in the introduction of Persian into the country. Being the language of the rulers, it was accepted and used as the official language of administration and law courts. The higher echelons of the society, Muslims and Hindus alike, put a great premium on learning it as a second language and acquiring proficiency in it. Knowledge of Persian helped its learners to acquire social status, government positions, and material benefits, and to have themselves counted among the ruling bureaucracy. However, the language of culture, knowledge, and thought was still the Indian classical language, namely Sanskrit. Literature was written in Indian languages of the various regions. The languages of Hindu princely courts were also regional Indian languages. During this period a supra-regional language developed and became accepted at the popular level for interlingual communication. The religious movements of this period (Sufism, devotional cults, etc.), which influenced almost the entire country and created a great mass consciousness at the religious and cultural levels, helped in the spread of the language to various parts of the country. A variety of Hindi extended its frontiers as the language of intercommunication at religious centers and places of pilgrimage in and outside the Hindi region. This accounted for the development of what



omic scholars have termed a "grassroots multilingualism" in Indian society (Pandit 1979). The awareness of and faith in the religious and cultural unity of the Indian society, in spite of its regional differences, contributed towards the spread of a Hindi variety of that time outside the Hindi region; and this language spread, in turn, became an instrument for furthering the awareness and conviction of unity. Thus while religious-cultural factors promoted the spread of a Hindi variety in non-Hindi regions on the one hand, military, administrative, and political factors spread Persian on the other. It may, however, be noted that, although both the languages spread as second languages, the spread of Persian was confined only to that section of the elite which was involved in the military and administrative life of the country, but Hindi spread more at the nonelite or mass level and as a kind of interlingual communication medium.

The advent of English in India marks the beginning of the modern age. The East India Company inherited the existence and use of a variety of languages for different communicative functions. The British decided to introduce the Western system of education in India, whose primary purpose, according to Macaulay who recommended it in 1835, was to prepare a class of people who, though Indian by birth, would be Western in their ideals, thoughts, preferences, likes and dislikes, and behavior and who would owe complete allegiance to the British Empire and would always further the interests of the Empire.

The British not only established and promoted English education, they also established an administrative and judicial system, which on the one hand promoted their colonial interests and on the other put a very high premium on the learning of English. With the increased mobility of a larger number of people, English became the sole medium of education, administration, trade, and commerce, in short of all formal domains of a society's functioning. Proficiency in English became the gateway to all social and material benefits. If one looked for a job in the government, in educational institutions, in trade, commerce, or industry, knowledge of English was found to be essential. English also became the hallmark of an educated, cultured, and modern man and hence a marker of social position and prestige. Thus, the assigning of all formal and even many semiformal communicative functions to English, together with the political patronage that the language enjoyed, contributed positively to its spread. English became the language of the elite class, language of privilege. With increased mobility of larger numbers of persons, and with the social and national consciousness created by exposure to Western thought and sociopolitical philosophy, English also fulfilled the function of interlingual communication for the

educated elite from various parts of the country. It is really surprising that with all the powerful factors contributing to the spread of English in India, only a very small minority of the population gained access to and acquired proficiency in it.

The position of Hindi and other Indian languages at the turn of the present century was definitely unenviable. They were used in informal settings. They were not media of education at the high school level; they were taught as vernaculars, a subject of study at school. They did not find any place in higher education. All communicative functions in formal domains were performed by English and not by Indian languages. Indian languages were, however, the vehicles for literary expression. Thus, they did fulfill the affective function but not the instrumental one. They were used in personal interactions but not in transactional interactions. Because of limited interactional roles, these languages were neither developed (in the sense of being vehicles of knowledge) nor fully standardized. Many of them showed a high degree of linguistic diversity. Some speech communities like Tamil, Telugu, and Bengali, etc., were also characterized by a high degree of diglossia.

The educated elite was indifferent towards the status and role of these languages. They neither favored nor promoted them. Their attitude towards them was at best neutral, if not downright negative. However, even towards the latter part of the nineteenth century, there were some thoughtful, nationalistic-minded persons like Kesav Chandra Sen, who realized the importance of developing a national language as an interlingual communication medium for the entire country and who recognized also the potential of such a language as a binding force in the Freedom Movement. Even at this time Hindi (or Hindustani) was fairly widely understood and used in the north in general and in religious centers and other interactional locales in the south where common people from various parts of the country congregated. It was realized that while the English-educated elite had a pan-Indian communication medium in the form of English, the common people communicated in the form of Hindi/Hindustani (or a variety thereof).

During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, reform movements like Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj were started and became quite popular in north India. The ushering in of the twentieth century saw a wave of cultural revivalism on the one hand and the freedom movement on the other. Both these movements not only gave a positive fillip to the Indian languages in general, they also emphasized the need for developing a national language (*rāṣṭra-bhāṣā*). B. G. Tilak, one of the first national leaders in the Indian National Congress, suggested that Hindi in Devanagari script be accepted as the national



language. In a conference organized by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in 1905, he forcefully argued for the acceptance of Hindi in Devanagari script as the most potent force for drawing a nation together (Gopal 1936: 240-42). Mahatma Gandhi brought a singular persistence and organizational involvement to the cause of the national promotion of Hindi. He pointed out five requirements for a language to be accepted as a national language: (1) it should be easy for Government officials to learn; (2) it should have the capability to function as a medium of religious, economic, and political interaction throughout the country; (3) it should be the speech of the majority of Indians; (4) it should be easy for the common people in the entire country to learn; (5) it should be chosen not on the basis of temporary or passing interests but on a longterm basis. Gandhi declared that English did not meet any of these requirements and asserted that Hindi fulfilled all the conditions (Gandhi 1936:3-4).

Gandhi not only supported the national language movement, he was also responsible for establishing the Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti in Wardha for the promotion and propagation of Hindi. By this time a sizable number of voluntary organizations had already been established and were engaged in promotion and propagation work. The foremost among them were Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Varanasi; Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag; Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, Madras; and the Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti, Wardha. Some of these voluntary agencies had their branches or affiliates in various states in the country by this time. Thus the cause of the spread of the Hindi language was positively accelerated by the Freedom Movement.

After the Indian Independence in 1947, the constituent Assembly voted for accepting Hindi in Devanagari script as the language of the Centre, setting a time limit of fifteen years for completion of the switchover to Hindi.

Once Hindi was accepted as the official language for the Union Government, its promotion, development and spread became the constitutional responsibility of the central government. Thus three kinds of agencies have become actively engaged in the spread of Hindi—governmental agencies, semigovernmental agencies, and voluntary organizations. Individual efforts on the part of dedicated and enthusiastic nationalists still continue unabated.

As the selection of the variety of language to be developed and promoted was made, the codification and elaboration of its stylistic and registerial forms for newly created communicative functions became the main task of persons connected with the development and spread of the language, and of the language-policy-and-planning implementors within

the government and outside. The constitution of the country clearly lays down the direction for the language's development and states guidelines for it.

The government undertook various programs for the implementation of the constitutional directives. The form of the standard variety was explicitly and clearly enunciated and its structural properties and details stated. Two organizations—Central Hindi Directorate and Council of Scientific and Technical Terminology—were set up. The Council (CSTT) undertook the task of preparing technical terms in various fields of knowledge—social sciences, physical and biological sciences, commerce, technology, medicine, and law and jurisprudence. On the basis of explicitly stated guidelines, committees of experts (subject-matter experts as well as language experts) engaged themselves in creating technical terms. The task, being gigantic, took a fairly long time to complete. By the latter part of the sixties, over 200,000 terms had been prepared, revised, and finalized. These glossaries are now being used in the production of scientific and technical literature in Hindi. To facilitate the conversion of the language of administration, the preparation of glossaries of administrative terms has also been undertaken. Six states and one union territory of the Hindi-speaking region were also involved in this task, and their participation has made available a wealth of competing terms and terminologies, thus affording the compilers the chance to select the most appropriate terms and gradually to discard others. This certainly created a state of confusion initially, but the situation has clarified and stabilized itself by now.

An organized program has been underway for more than twelve years now for the production of textbooks and reference materials that facilitate the use of Hindi as the medium of education at the college and university levels in different fields of study. Although translations have been done, the emphasis has all along been, and rightly so, on the production of original materials in Hindi. It must be admitted that the actual switchover of the medium of instruction has not been coordinated adequately with the production of this literature, and the priorities have also not been properly worked out. Consequently, the production of such literature has not kept pace with the need. As the work has been undertaken in haste, the quality of material has not been satisfactory. Registers of Hindi for specific fields of study have not yet been fully worked out, nor have they obtained the stability they should in terms of the form of language (the structures as well as items of use).

In the field of education, the conversion from English to Hindi as the medium of instruction at the college and university level has been gradual and cautious, so that standards of educational content and qual-



iv do not suffer. The universities and institutions of higher learning, being autonomous, have been conservative and have tended to cling to the status quo. However, Hindi now is being utilized as a medium of instruction in arts, social sciences, and to a certain extent in the physical and biological sciences. Medical and technical education still continues to be imparted through English. Many institutions now provide Hindi as well as English as optional media. This is true not only of Hindi areas, but also of some institutions in non-Hindi-speaking areas.

In school education, Hindi has been made a compulsory language under the three-language formula for the non-Hindi-speaking states. In such states Hindi is a compulsory subject for three or four years starting in the fifth grade. Provisions for its study in higher grades are also made in many states. It is possible to decline to adhere to central government policies and guidelines on the parts of the states in India. However, all the states except Tamilnadu follow and implement the three-language formula, which means that Hindi is spreading among all the school-going children and is learned by them as one of the non-native compulsory languages. Thus, the formal educational system is acting as an important agent in the spread of Hindi.

The spread of Hindi as the language of administration has been promoted by a series of governmental orders enjoining government employees to learn it, by the establishment of facilities for learning the language with a special emphasis on learning the administrative register of the language, and by a series of financial incentives and rewards. Although these measures have helped in the spread of the language for purposes of formal transactions, the results have not been satisfactory. Since acquiring proficiency in Hindi has been viewed as a voluntary, individual attainment, there has been a lack of organized effort among the hierarchies of administration. This has resulted in the creation of an atmosphere of indifference, and consequently, training has been wasted.

One of the powerful and effective agents of the spread of Hindi has been the mass media, the radio, television (wherever it is available), and the newspapers. Not only has the number of Hindi newspapers (dailies, weeklies), magazines, and journals increased, the readership has also increased. This is a function not only of increased literacy, but also of the spread of the language into areas and contexts in which it was not used earlier.

Some other steps for the spread of Hindi have also been taken by the government. Standardization of the script and of spelling and related steps have facilitated the development of technological aids like typewriters, teleprinters, printing materials, and other printing and repro-

ducing device which have directly and indirectly helped the spread. The role of Hindi cinema as one of the most powerful agents, if not the most powerful one, in the spread of Hindi in non-Hindi-speaking regions of the country is very well known and established.

The Hindi-speaking community is a very large one. About 30 percent of the population speaks Hindi natively, and another 5 percent are mother-tongue speakers of Urdu, which is closely related to Hindi and which, together with Hindi, was formerly referred to as "Hindustani." When we add the second-language users of Hindi, the language becomes a major force in the trade, commerce, banking, and industrial activities of the country. Knowledge of Hindi is now becoming either an essential or desirable requirement for getting jobs or promotions in many business houses, banks, advertising agencies, and the like. It may be noted here that figures recorded by the Census for the use of Hindi as a subsidiary language err very much toward underreporting. Sample studies have shown that the incidence of the knowledge and use of Hindi as a second language is much higher than reported.

Hindi has spread and continues to spread as a language of wider communication in India due to a multiplicity of factors. The forms of the language that have spread and are in the process of spreading, the functions for which they are spreading, and the degree to which the locale favors the spread—all are interrelated.

It is necessary to distinguish the spread of the standard form in the Hindi region itself from its spread in non-Hindi regions. In the region where it spreads as a superstructure, strict adherence is kept to learning the prescribed/accepted norm as far as its written form is concerned. The standard spoken form shows dialectal influences in pronunciation as well as grammar. Lack of concern as well as lack of adherence to the use of the *re* construction (a highly marked feature of standard Hindi) in spoken standard in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is well known. As a matter of fact, such deviations from the norms are considered to be a matter of the native user's freedom of use. These features further mark the regional affiliation of the users.

A second and important form of the language which is spreading is that which is being diffused by agencies of language spread in non-Hindi regions. The pleas for the simplification of some aspects of Hindi structures and grammatical characteristics on the part of Sunil Kumar Chatterjee and many so-called advocates of Hindi are well known. There is no great need to go into the details of this controversy. It is sufficient to state that in spite of such appeals, sometimes impassioned ones, there has been no deliberate and planned attempt on the part of Hindi or non-Hindi users to simplify the grammar of the language.



However, it is well known that standard Hindi as used, spoken as well as written, in various parts of non-Hindi regions, has developed and/or is developing distinct patterns of deviations. Studies made on Kannada-Hindi, Telugu-Hindi, Tamil-Hindi, and Malayalam-Hindi reveal these patterns (Misra 1975). A study of various other varieties will help us in determining the form of pan-Indian Hindi.

The third and the most important form of the language that has spread and is spreading further is the lingua franca form, which is highly contextualized, shows pidginized features, and has more or less exclusively a spoken form. It is learned informally in interpersonal interaction settings, serves the purpose of intercommunication between speakers and users of different languages in metropolitan centers outside the Hindi region, places of pilgrimage, religious centers, bazaars, and also in the industrial centers which draw pan-Indian populations. Quite often both the parties involved in such interactional settings are nonnative speakers of Hindi. In such locales, even in the Hindi regions, the pidginized varieties are in common vogue. It must be noted here that different varieties of pidgins have developed in different parts in the country. Studies of Bombay-Hindi, Calcutta Bazaar-Hindi, Nag-puri-Hindi, etc., have revealed differences in these varieties, as well as pan-Indian commonalities, with respect to the linguistic details of pidginization of marked linguistic features. Related to this development in the process of the spread of Hindi is also the development of specific regional lingua francas like Halbi, Sadri, etc., in specific regions, mainly regions where tribal dialects are in use as mother tongues. While the pidginized varieties show more fluidity and serve restricted communicative needs, the lingua francas have over a period of time become more stabilized and are by now showing features of creolization.

Hindi has spread and is further spreading for transactional interactions more than for personal interactions. It serves instrumental functions rather than integrative functions. The domains in which it is used are the more semiformal ones, and it is used more for between-group communication than for within-group communication functions. It has, up to this time, spread more for horizontal integration than for vertical. These functions predominantly require only speaking skills, but recently writing as well as translating skills are gaining more importance, as the formal channels of spread are being utilized more and more.

The spread of Hindi has been most rapid in urban and semiurban areas, religious, industrial, and mercantile centers up to this time. However, the exploitation of the formal educational channels is now helping the language's spread in the rural areas. Increased and more effective means of transport and communication are playing a positive role in the

spread of the language by making a greater number of people mobile. Access and availability of inexpensive radios and transistors, increase in the number of movie houses, and the more frequent showing of Hindi films (due to their popularity) are also accelerating the spread of Hindi. Thus, educational facilities and mass media are now playing a positive role in the spread of Hindi in non-Hindi regions.

Formal as well as informal channels of spread are providing facilities for the creation of a greater number of adopters and conveyers of the spread of Hindi in India. Factors contributing towards its spread are social, economic, political, and cultural. In spite of a certain amount of opposition to Hindi as the language of the Union Government on the part of persons and organizations in some parts of the country, the language has been gradually spreading due to the societal need for the development of a pan-Indian communication medium. Such a role, it has been realized, has not been fulfilled by English and cannot be fulfilled by any language other than Hindi, not because it is the mother tongue of one-third of the population, but because of the role it has played in the society up to this time and is fit to play in future. Nationalism, democratization, the spread of educational facilities, and economic, political, and social developments have all congregated in its favor.

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